



January 2014 From One Youth's Perspective

As we start the New Year, one of the things I find to be so important in our work is hearing from youth. By really listening to youth, we can learn much and be encouraged in the work that we do. This is why this month the brief has been turned over to Youth J to share with you some of his thoughts about his stay at DHS and parole experience.

I spent 20 months at Indian River JCF, and I was on parole supervision with the Cleveland Region for about 3 months. What made a difference for me was the staff that actually noticed the good things I was doing. It made a difference when staff didn't treat me like an inmate and treated me with respect. Some treated me like I was family. This made me comfortable. This made my days better. This made me want to keep doing good.

While I was in a facility, the mentoring program gave me a sense of leadership. The Youth Council motivated me to be a good leader and do the right thing. My school experience was difficult but also nice. It made a difference having teachers who looked out for me. They have a hard job with things being crazy, but if you want to learn, they will make sure that they give you attention. My Transition Coordinator helped me fill out my FAFSA and create a resume. Now I'm in college.

One of the things I learned is that I am responsible. I don't need people to tell me what to do; I can just be responsible for myself.

My mom helped me during all of this. She sent me letters every day. When there was pressure to be part of a gang, she encouraged me to stay strong and do the right thing.

The one message that I have for staff is this: don't judge a book by its cover. Some kids look like troublemakers. Look past that. If you take the time, and don't overlook a person, then they will be able to do great things.

I thank Youth J for sharing with all of us. Thank you to all of the staff who made a difference by focusing on his strengths and supporting family ties. Be sure to really notice a youth today. See past the imperfections to the potential that lies within. With understanding and respect, we can help instill a sense of growth, maturity and responsibility that will grow youth into successful adults.